

Georgia Southern University

Digital Commons@Georgia Southern

Newsroom

Office of Strategic Communications &
Marketing

3-4-2020

Newsroom

Georgia Southern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Georgia Southern University, "Newsroom" (2020). *Newsroom*. 1816.
<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/newsroom/1816>

This article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Strategic Communications & Marketing at Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. It has been accepted for inclusion in Newsroom by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Georgia Southern. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@georgiasouthern.edu.

Georgia Southern Counseling Center Assistant Director receives national award

March 4, 2020

Rebecca K. Smith, assistant director of the Georgia Southern University Counseling Center (GSU-CC), was awarded the Professional Leadership award during the American College Counseling Association (ACCA) annual conference in Washington, D.C.

The award is presented to an individual who has demonstrated leadership in some aspect of college counseling as it relates to the purposes and goals of ACCA, or leadership and contributions to ACCA as a professional organization.

Smith received a Master of Arts in Community and Agency Counseling in 1999 from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois. Prior to joining the Armstrong Campus Counseling Center in May 2018 as assistant director, she served as associate director of counseling at Valdosta State University. Smith served as chair of the Social Media Committee of the ACCA from 2016-2018, and she currently serves as Secretary of the ACCA for 2018-2020.



Rebecca K. Smith

The GSU-CC is accredited by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services. Its mission is to provide direct clinical services to the students of Georgia Southern, outreach and prevention programming to the University communities and professional development and training for mental health providers.

Sweet Memories: Georgia Southern staffer pens 100-year history of Leopold's Ice Cream; memoir headed to the big screen

March 4, 2020



Melanie Simón (left), communications manager, and Wes Johnson (right), graphic designer, display the book *Leopold's Ice Cream: A Century of Tasty Memories*, which launched Feb. 15.

If you ask Melanie Simón if she ever imagined being a two-time author with one book in development for a Hollywood film, she'll just laugh and say "absolutely not!"

On Feb. 15, the communications manager on the Armstrong Campus released her second book, *Leopold's Ice Cream: A Century of Tasty Memories*, at a launch party at the flagship ice cream shop on Broughton Street in downtown Savannah. Featuring a foreword by former President Jimmy Carter, the book recounts the story of the Leopold brothers and their family in Savannah between 1901 and 2019, including the life of film producer and renowned ice cream maker Stratton Leopold, who served as vice president of production for Paramount Pictures and executive producer of "Mission Impossible III," among others.

"The shop is really an homage to his father," said Simón. "I think when you understand the history, you understand that Stratton's dedication to the community stems from his father. And that was the great legacy, I think, that his father passed down to him, and he's absolutely committed to keeping that alive."

Leopold's family immigrated to the United States from Greece, crammed for weeks on a steamship to Ellis Island, and in 1905, moved to the city of Savannah — the population of which had not even reached 60,000 people at the time. Through 128 pages filled with photos, documents and Savannah history, Simón recounts the shop's rise from a little fruit stand on the corner of Habersham and Gwinnett streets to the internationally renowned attraction and institution it has become today.

To help tell the visual part of the story, Simón enlisted the help of Wes Johnson, a graphic designer and colleague on the University Communications and Marketing team. He says the project began with more than 1,000 photos, documents, postcards and more from which he would have to cull to its final page count. And while it was a daunting process, he says it was also surprising and illuminating.

“It was definitely a mountain,” said Johnson. “I didn’t realize Stratton was such a big deal until I worked on the book. Because going to Leopold’s as a tourist or someone new to the area you see all the memorabilia and stuff and you think, ‘Oh, he must like movies.’ Then you go through and see all the pictures of him with Morgan Freeman and Tom Cruise and you’re like, ‘Oh, wow. He’s definitely made a name for himself with some huge people.’”

For Simón, the book was a very personal task for a family she has come to cherish. Over the last few years, Leopold and his wife, Mary, have become her personal friends, and asked her specifically to write their family history.

Simón first met Leopold in 2014. At the time, she was an unknown writer who couldn’t find an agent or a publisher for her first book, *La Americana*, the story of her life-changing trip to Cuba, where she met and fell in love with her husband and the Cuban culture. In the interim, she was writing a blog about her family, about bicultural experiences, and began interviewing notable people with bicultural backgrounds.

On her interview wish list was Stratton Leopold, but she figured he lived in Hollywood and she’d have little if any chance to interview him. On a random day in Savannah, however, she was sitting in a coffee shop on Habersham Street when Leopold walked in.

“What are the odds that he would walk into this little coffee shop?” said Simón. “So I walked up to him and asked if there was any chance I could interview him and he said, ‘Absolutely!’ Later, when I went to the shop to talk to him I thought it would be a 20-minute conversation, but we sat chatting for close to two hours.”

Simón thought the meeting would be the last she’d see of the movie mogul, but three years later, when she hosted a book launch party for *La Americana*, Leopold showed up again, and gave her the surprise of her life.

“He just walked straight to me and leaned in and said, ‘This is a film,’” she said. “I was stunned and didn’t know what to say. He repeated, ‘This is a film.’ I stuttered out, ‘okay, well, what do I do?’ So, then Stratton and I started meeting about what to do.”

Since those initial meetings in 2016, *La Americana* went on to be a bestseller, and she and Leopold are in talks with a couple of studios right now.

For now, however, Simón says she is just happy to be finished with her second book, which took an intense two years to research, write and edit before the official 100-year mark for the ice cream shop. While she is no stranger to storytelling, doing justice to someone else’s story was a different experience.

“This was by far, my largest writing exercise to date. Capturing the essence of a family, of a business — and iconic family and iconic business — is no small feat,” she said. “And these are people that I consider my friends, and I wanted to honor their legacy.

“I think now I can look back at it and say it was a very, very rewarding project. I was honored to write it. I’m proud of it, and Wes certainly should be as well.”

“I’m very proud,” said Johnson. “Yeah, I’m stoked. I can’t wait to have my mom read it.”